The Keys to Happiness from *Anne of Green Gables*

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What do we need to be happy? Accomplishing dreams, good work, health, romance, or money? It’s usual to think about getting something. However, remember the story, *The Blue Bird*, by Maeterlinck (1910). Tyltyl and Mytyl, who searched for the Blue Bird of happiness all over the world, couldn’t find it and came back to their home. However, the Blue Bird *was* in the cage in their home! Is happiness not to be found outside, but inside—in our lives now? Furthermore, is it gotten by intention or not? To answer these, *Anne of Green Gables* (Montgomery, 1908) has the keys. It’s a novel which swept all over the world (Kajihara, 1999). Many reasons can be found for this remarkable bestseller, but I think the major reason is the happiness of Anne, the heroine. Why is she happy? The reasons can be reduced to four and I think they are the keys to happiness which are unchangeable for all ages: to cherish daily life, to think positive, to be ambitious, and to share happiness with others.

Anne is an orphan who was adopted into the Cuthbirt family. Her lonely and hard experience before the adoption may have made her sensitive to the happiness we tend to gloss over. She joyfully talks of her gratitude to have a family, the joy to have a home to return to, and her happiness to be alive. She teaches us anew how precious those usual things are for us. She loves tiny things in her daily life: flowers, morning and evening, riding in a carriage, sleeping, and dreaming. When Anne was going to decorate her bedroom with some twigs, she was told by Marilla, one of the Cuthbirts, not to do it because bedrooms were made to sleep in. Her reply was, “Oh, and dream in, too, Marilla. And you know one can dream so much better in a room where there are pretty things” (Montgomery, 1908, p. 127). She always finds new, enjoyable angles in many things and loves them. As Mushanokōji (1966, p. 29) wrote, “Though there are people who easily feel happy and who do not, it isn’t due to Fortune, but the difference of preparation of the person’s mind.” Anne wakes up every morning excited to think what will happen today, in this new day. It seems her mind has good preparation; this attitude or custom is the first key. If we think to get something like success or money, we can’t be happy until we get the object of happiness. Moreover, if we do get, the happiness may be transitory. To become happy is to learn to live happily (Shiawase otaku, n.d.). Anne’s attitude to find and love small happiness in daily life makes her life happy.

However, the true value of such attitude is shown in hard, desperate cases. Anne says, “You can nearly always enjoy things if you make up your mind firmly that you will. Of course, you must make it up *firmly*” (Montgomery, 1908, p. 40). These words give us a strong message. According to Itō, “There should come great deference between people who have recognized that there will be a bright spot in any things and who haven’t” (2004, p. 83). I think such a positive angle will make us happy, that means, strong. If we keep this angle *every* time, then, is there anything still we should fear? These words also suggest that there is a will in happiness. In this world, it is easy to be unhappy, so there is a stronger will in happiness than people suppose. In other words, as Alain (1998, p. 16) noted, “Pessimistic is based on mood, in contrast, optimistic is based on will.” Life is not always so sweet. Therefore, people often become pessimistic. Giving up to change, irony, and poignancy, some people seem to think such a dead angle is the way to live. However, Anne always tells that it is happy to hope for something: in this imperfect world, there is scope for imagination and there is a pleasure to realize the dreams. Knowing the severe reality, she wins it over to her side. I think this is the ultimate positive thinking and it’s the second key.

By the way, Anne is thought of as a heroine of sweet novel for “girls” in Japan. Many people imagine her to be domestic and girlish while making patchwork quilts or cakes (Fair Lady, n.d.). However, she is actually bad at housework because she isn’t interested in things done by repeating a set way. The true image of Anne is not a girl who is squashed in the Victorian etiquette but an active, modern girl (Matsumoto, 1999). She always has an attitude toward progress, high ideals, and a positive way of thinking. From early childhood, she studied hard, rivaling the cleverest boy in grades, and passed the examination of a teacher’s college with flying colors. Entering the college, she starts aiming for the scholarship for a university which is given to the top student. She says, “It’s delightful to have ambitions. I’m so glad I have such a lot. And there never seems to be any end to them—that’s the best of it. Just as soon as you attain one ambition you see another one glittering higher up still. It does make life so interesting” (Montgomery, 1908, p. 299). She has ambitions and when one of them comes true, finds the next hope and makes effort to achieve it. George Eliot once commented, “What makes a life bleak is lack of motive” (Maltz, 1967, p. 103). Anne seemed to be a lump of motives. Therefore, she notches up a rich, full life. Once she is motivated, she does her best and devotes herself to the dream. It is a recipe for happiness by concentrating on a thing and being absorbed body and soul in it (Glocheux, 1998). To have ambitions, however, demands time and energy. We will be compelled to exercise diligence and self-control. Moreover, anxiety and dismay will come over us. Anne teaches us the courage to face and overcome them, for avoiding them is a way far from a happy life (Alain, 1998). The brave will to change an easy life to difficult life—the third key is heavy but essential: to be ambitious.

Through her great effort, Anne graduated from the college with the scholarship. She was so happy to realize the dream to go to the university. However, in such happy days, Matthew, one of the Cuthbirts, died. If she goes to the university which is far from her home, Marilla, who has trouble with her eyes, will be left alone. Anne decides to refuse the scholarship to go to the university. Instead, she chooses to stay home with Marilla and become a teacher of her home school. In spite of that decision, she doesn’t give up her dream of learning. Working at school, she decided to continue learning and never forget the ambitions for her future. She is not sad as she says, “I shall give life here my best, and I believe it will give its best to me in return. When I left Queen’s my future seemed to stretch out before me like a straight road. I thought I could see along it for many a milestone. Now there is a bend in it. I don’t know what lies around the bend, but I’m going to believe that the best does” (Montgomery, 1908, p. 324). Her positive attitude is seen strongly in these words. She knows to live balancing her ambitions and her loving life (Matsumoto, 1999). She never thinks to become happy alone, as she knows she can’t be happy in that way because happiness is a kind of things which is gotten by giving it to others. To share happiness with others is the last key.

How can one become happy? Four keys are drawn from *Anne of Green Gables*: cherishing simple daily pleasures, thinking positive about all things at all times, having dreams, and not to have happiness all to ourselves but sharing with pleasure. There may be people who like a pessimistic attitude, but I think we can see an unchangeable view of life in Anne. Happiness is always within easy reach in our lives and minds because it’s due to our will to be happy and our attitude about the world. Blue Bird *is* in the home.

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